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For most Chinese people, the [Spring Festival](#) is a time to honor family ties, friendships and acquaintances.

This is what producers of this year's Annual Spring Festival Gala on China's national broadcaster, CCTV, probably had in mind when they agreed to include a [comedy skit](#) about the growing ties between China and African countries called "Celebrating Together" (同喜同乐).

In a celebration of Sino-African friendship, what could go wrong? In fact, quite a lot.

The 13-minute long skit opens with dozens of African performers, alongside antelopes and a lion, dancing to the tune of Shakira's "Waka Waka", all rejoicing over the opening of the China-built Nairobi to Mombasa Railway. They are joined by a group of Kenyan train attendants and the female lead, a Gabonese actress speaking fluent Mandarin.

2018 - China - CCTV's Lunar New Year TV Gala Showcase 'Racist Blackface' Afric...

CCTV's 2018 Lunar New Year TV Gala.

And, then, a well-known Chinese actress in full blackface comes on stage wearing a colorful yellow dress, fully equipped with oversized butt pads, carrying a fruit plate on her head and leading a cheerful monkey played by an unidentified African actor.

In less than 12 hours, descriptions of the skit were all over [international media](#) – always ready to run a “China, the foe” story. Turning to the Twittersphere, the public opinion thermometer of the 21st century, journalists found a divided audience: many called it racist, others argued it was not.



Huizit

@iamHuizit

CCTV's racist show during Spring Gala shook me and made me so ashamed of China and my people. They literally had blackface on stage, had an African actor to play a monkey and a African actress yelling "I love China!" Racism is global y'all...

8:37 PM - Feb 15, 2018

3,333 1,518 people are talking about this



雨曦。🍡🍡。
@yuxisushi

CHINA WHYYYYYY. i'm watching the cctv spring festival new year's gala and there's straight up blackface, i just don't know what to do with this level of offensive oh my GOD

9:49 AM - Feb 15, 2018

See 雨曦。🍡🍡.'s other Tweets

The skit might not have been ill-intentioned. But it was both culturally and racially insensitive. It also reeked of propaganda and relied on all the stereotypes about Africa that Chinese media claim to be debunking in their public diplomacy activities in the continent.

Chinese representation of Africa

It is not the first time that a Chinese state-sanctioned production has misrepresented Africa and African people in such a grotesque way. Last summer, the movie “[Wolf Warrior 2](#)”, the highest-grossing Chinese film ever, managed to bring together in a single movie all the clichés of Hollywood’s white-savior sub-genre: an unnamed African country affected by a deadly disease descends into chaos as civil war erupts. That is, until a Chinese mercenary comes to the rescue.

All film scripts in China [must be pre-approved](#) before production starts and they must get a final green light before they’re released. CCTV’s Spring Festival Gala also goes through multiple stages of supervision. Sometimes movies and TV acts are tossed out because a red flag is raised. That clearly didn’t happen this time.

Neither “Wolf Warrior 2” nor the Spring Festival Gala were conceived with

global audiences in mind. They are cultural artifacts that speak to domestic audiences and, as such, they are tuned to the so-called “[main melody](#)”, a concept often attributed to China’s president in the 1990s, [Jiang Zemin](#). Cultural products that dance to the main melody need to be aesthetically attractive to the masses, but remain politically aligned with the doctrine of the Communist Party.

China has a different repertoire for global audiences. As part of its quest to improve its image overseas, Beijing has promoted the expansion of companies like CGTN, Xinhua, China Daily and StarTimes. All have a strong presence in Africa, where they claim to be presenting a different view of the continent and its people.

These efforts are hit hard every time a gaffe, such as the CCTV’s skit, goes on air.

Savannas and safaris

Chinese media portray Africa in stereotypes not dissimilar to the rest of the world. The continent is routinely treated as a single unit, erasing its linguistic, racial and cultural diversity. It is often associated with clichéd images such as savannas and safaris and its transformations over the last 30 years reduced to a market logic under the tagline “Africa rising”.

While misrepresentations of Africa are not an exclusive problem of Chinese media, two things set China apart.

As the release of “[Black Panther](#)” has shown, many in the US are ready to engage in an open discussion about how the US movie industry has, for

decades, failed to address racial biases.

In China, criticism of the CCTV African skit [on social media has been censored](#). This is not surprising, given that, every year, Chinese censors work hard to erase negative comments of a show that has gone from being a must-watch for many Chinese families to a source of memes and jokes for younger generations.

This suggests that China needs to have a conversation about racial insensitivity, which is too common and too often dismissed as cultural specificity. The cultural specificity argument goes like this: while something might be considered offensive in the “West” (for example, blackface), it is not in China, and, therefore, there is no need to feel offended by it.

Hard to say sorry

For a long time Beijing has kept a double narrative going in its media strategy—one for domestic consumption and another one for global audiences. This worked in a pre-Internet era.

If China wants to be viewed as a responsible global actor, it needs to find appropriate ways to prevent controversies such as the one created by the offensive CCTV skit. It could, for example, seek out African specialists at Chinese universities to offer expert advice.

More importantly, when errors are made—and Chinese leaders need to accept that nobody is infallible – Beijing needs to be ready to acknowledge them.

Foreign companies, and sometimes foreign media, are forced to issue an

apology when their actions are deemed to hurt Chinese people. Will CCTV be offering one? For now, that seems unlikely. Speaking to the press, the ministry of foreign affairs has [dismissed the controversy](#) and taken the usual path: attacking those who brought up the issue.

Next time Beijing may want to change its approach. By apologizing, it would show the world that it is becoming an empathetic global power.

[Dani Madrid-Morales](#), PhD Fellow in Media and Communication, [City University of Hong Kong](#)

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

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ABOVE IT ALL

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LUBUMBASHI, DR CONGO

The Democratic Republic of Congo's economic capital and mining hub has mineral deposits so rich that the ground is a deep red, but the dust clings to a city where inequality is stark.

Like in any poor urban area, sports represents a way out. For most, that dream would be to play for the city's [well known soccer club](#) TP Mazembe. More recently, thanks to Bismack Byombo's [drafting to the NBA](#) in 2011, basketball is taking off on Lubumbashi's street corners.

On Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings, a new sport offers itself as a way out. Now, another sport wants to offer a way out for young Congolese, but that sport may already be so inaccessible to the poor and working class that its efforts to groom new Congolese talent seem out of touch with the country's realities, no matter how noble its intentions.



“It’s a sport assumed to be just for wealthy,” says Malta David Forrest, the president of Lubumbashi’s equestrian club and local showjumping enthusiast. Named after his grandfather who [started a transport](#) company in the Congo in 1922, he is the son of George Forrest, the “[viceroy of Katanga](#)” and the [tycoon at the helm](#) of the [Forrest Group International](#), which has since expanded across four countries to include sectors ranging from banking to energy, and of course mining and engineering.

“And that’s why as a club we’ve invested in horses to allow it to be affordable. I’d like to think we’ve succeeded as most of our young riders are Congolese,”


says Forrest, sitting in his CEO's office at the surprisingly modest office in Lubumbashi, except for the smell of cigar smoke in the air.

The company is still family owned, and the Forrests maintain New Zealand and Belgian citizenship thanks to their grandfather. Malta David Forrest was born in Kolwezi in 1971, south of Lubumbashi, but does not have Congolese citizenship because the DRC does not allow dual citizenship, but he is able to do business in the country with no issue.

Lubumbashi's is the last surviving of five horse clubs in the country and opening it up to the community and helping a new generation of riders foster a connection with the animals is what Forrest believes will sustain the club.

“For the riders when you are on the horse you can dream because you're above everything,” he says.

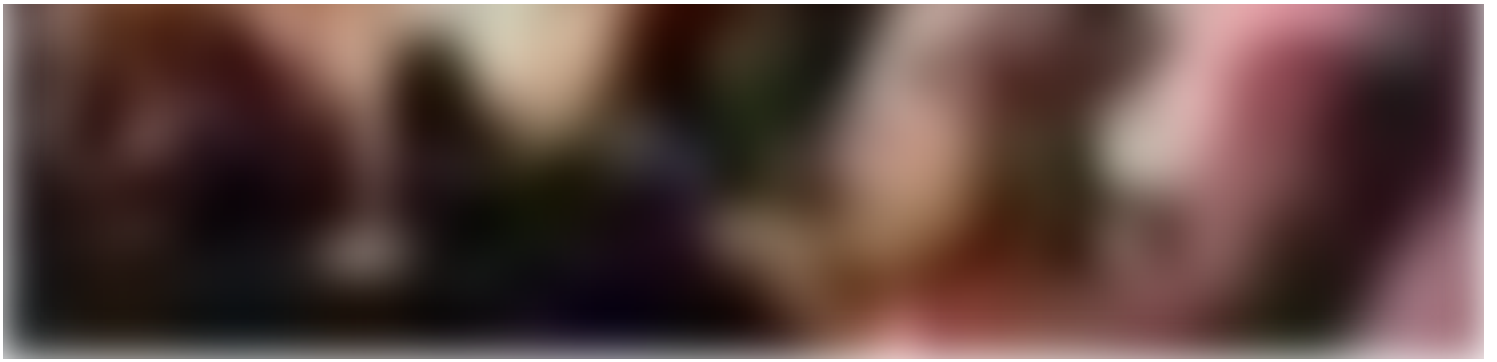




The Forrest Group has weathered independence, the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, the coup of Laurent Kabila and the [ongoing uncertainty under his son](#), current president, Joseph Kabila. Amnesty International has [accused the group](#) of illegally bulldozing, which the [group denies \(pdf\)](#), while a [Wikileaks cable](#) accused one of its mines of ignoring high radioactivity levels, an exposé which seems to have gone nowhere. Forrest refuses to be drawn into politics, saying only that the region known to be an opposition stronghold has struggled somewhat and infrastructure projects have halted.

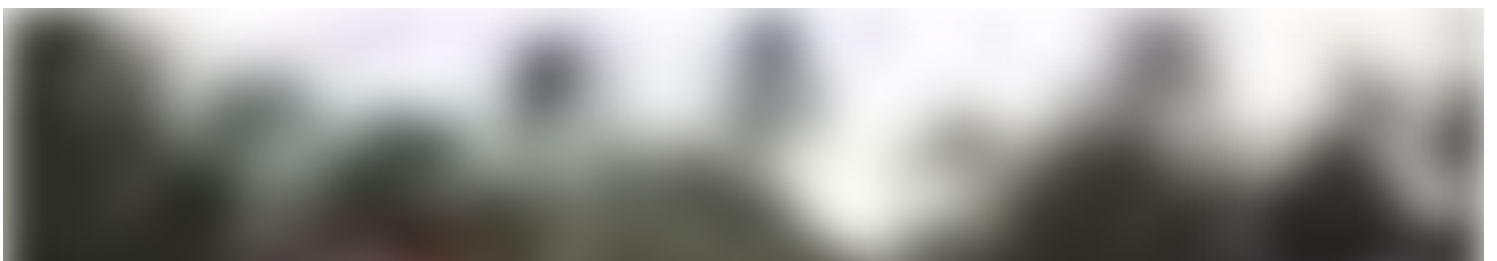
He will, however, talk about horses. Forrest has been riding from the age of six, and remembers a time about twenty years ago when he could ride through the city streets (the family is rumored to have turned their compound into something of a small private animal sanctuary during the Mobutu years). Now as the population expands the facilities that date back to when the city was known as Elisabethville struggles to keep up. The DR Congo's mineral wealth has created a small but very wealthy class whose lives look nothing like the majority of the country, where the gross national income (GNI PPP) was just \$730 in 2016, according to the World Bank.





At the showjumping arena, the colonial-era comparisons are of a different kind. Lubumbashi's moneyed and aspirational quaff complimentary champagne and French and South African wines on the second floor of a clubhouse that overlooks the jumping fences and lawns. Here, Forrest is something of a celebrity, firmly ensconced in the top floor of the clubhouse, where his wife also acts as a commentator, her voice booming over the loudspeaker as the jumps are scored. Out back are well-kept stables and horses with shining manes. It's a world away from the city just beyond the walls.

A new generation of riders though look nothing like the colonial-era equestrian enthusiasts who may have ridden here before. Most of them are giggling Congolese adolescents who take the sport very seriously. Their parents are entrepreneurs who want to prepare them for life beyond Congo, so many of them attend international schools and slip easily between French and English. In Lubumbashi, there isn't much to do beyond WhatsApp groups and playing with Snapchat filters for the girls ages between eight and 13 so these events are as much a social gathering for them, as it is an aspiration for their parents.





“It was a dream for me. Coming from a Muslim family, my father didn’t allow me to do this. “So when I had my kids, I said I want you to do this,” says Jamila Mwanza, in between comforting her daughter Sonia who took a fall. A businesswoman who moved to the more stable Katanga region from the east, her hometown of Bukavu also had a showjumping ring before it was a destroyed by the war.

“I own my horses,” says Lucas Katebe confidently. The nephew of exiled opposition leader [Moise Katumbi](#), he purchases his horses in Germany and Belgium where they easily sell for around \$70,000, he explains. Homeschooled, Katebe speaks unaccented English and plans to go to university in London. The rising star of this arena, he hopes to become a professional rider. Clearly popular on and off his horse, his social status goes beyond the club. His coach is European and and he is mentored by Forrest, who is also [listed as vice president](#) of the soccer club Katumbi owns.

“When things got tough around the 90s a lot of businesses closed down,” recalls Forrest, describing how he’s kept the last equestrian club going in the Congo. “When you are in horse riding and want to promote the sport, you have to think medium-long term and that requires heavy investment.”



Forrest, it seems, has had no trouble attracting sponsors to a sport no one would associated with the Congo. All over the arena are the billboards of sponsors, including the Forrest Group. He organizes competitions and invites riders from Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The Congolese who work for the stables remain far removed though, earning \$200 a month looking after more than 50 horses for 12 hours a day. They’re quick to point out that it’s more than they would have made doing similar work around the city. Their children dare not dream of leaving Lubumbashi on horseback. Some working class Congolese bring their children to watch the show and feed the horses, but they remain outside of the clubhouse and excluded from this life.



On horseback, the riders are above it all, just as the equestrian club seems so far removed from life in Lubumbashi. The DRC's mineral wealth and abject poverty are well known, and the lives of Lubumbashi's wealthy and aspiring upper classes starkly demonstrate this inequality. The club's willingness to encourage new riders, albeit still wealthy ones, demonstrates a self-awareness of its place in this society. Still, should Lubumbashi's wealthy feel any moral obligation to the city's poor, any more so than the wealthy of any other city?


To any outsider, promoting a sport for the wealthy in an impoverished city raises uncomfortable questions about inequality and moral responsibility, especially in Africa. They are perhaps the same questions that arise when looking up at Cape Town's seaside mansions from the city's shanty towns, or passing by Lagos' floating Makoko slums on your way to your penthouse on Victoria Island. The world has gotten very comfortable with inequality.

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BY

SINGAPORE AIRLINES 





Catering to the airline passenger palate is a daunting culinary task. There are numerous, well-documented reasons for the notoriety of plane cuisine: For one, cabin pressure and dryness affect the taste and smell senses, dulling flavor profiles like sweet and salty.

Then there are the myriad logistical challenges of getting hundreds of meals prepared, packaged, and plated aboard a plane that may be in the air for as long as 17 hours. As anyone who has taken home leftover spinach salad to find it wilted and inedible only a few hours later can attest, some dishes simply don't travel well.

[Singapore Airlines](#), however, is changing popular opinion about what has generally been considered possible when it comes to dining at 30,000 feet. The airline's approach to in-air fare is less TV dinner, more "farm to tray table"—and it's setting a new standard for the industry.

Creativity in the lab and the kitchen

To provide a quality in-flight dining experience, Singapore Airlines combines science and creative problem-solving. The airline goes to great lengths to develop ethnically inspired dishes like chili crab and [pork tenderloin](#), and to serve beverages like fresh-squeezed orange juice in its first-class cabin.

The airline also has a serious commitment to quality control—and decades of experience in honing the process into an art form. [Hermann Freidanck](#) has served as the airline's head of food and beverage for more than 20 years, and has worked to implement advancements in both the laboratory and the kitchen.

Today, Freidanck explains, the airline's menu prep process works like this: Menu planning is conducted in Singapore, led by a team of chefs and advised by a council of internationally acclaimed experts who tweak menus based on en vogue culinary trends. Once a recipe has been rigorously stress-tested and perfected, Singapore Airlines contracts out the preparation process to caterers around the world. These entities are in charge of mastering menu presentation and securing the necessary ingredients; if a dish requires lobster, for example, the caterers must procure local lobster from trusted vendors.

Based on the regions the airline serves, the chefs devising the menu focus on four main types of cuisine: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Western. "Our philosophy is to never take a one-menu-fits-all approach," explains Freidanck. "For us, it's very important that our menus are destination-specific. This means, what is on the menu is relevant to the sector we are flying to: America, Europe, Australia, Asia, Japan, and so on."

Careful consideration is given, too, to global dining rituals and preferences. "Asian dining styles differ from what one would find in the West, where you have a starter, a soup, a main course, and then cheese and dessert," explains Freidanck. In Japan, for example, meals are often arranged by preparation style—pickled, fried, grilled, etc., and in China you'll find meals hosted around a large table, with a range of dishes presented simultaneously from a lazy susan.

Designing an aircraft cabin to accommodate a lazy susan is impractical, so Singapore Airline's team must get creative. The airline tweaks its serving methods to accommodate such dining customs.

“What we have done is taken a ten-course meal and split it apart into different, individual dishes, so you get a service sequence of different courses, which we then present to the passenger,” says Freidanck. “It’s quite complicated, but very specific to certain cultures and destinations where we fly.”

When it comes to combating the sensory-sapping effects of cabin pressure, Singapore Airlines leaves little to chance. Menu items are often sampled in a pressurized chamber that replicates in-flight conditions. Then, the chefs adjust the recipe—adding seasoning, cutting back on oil, or even reimagining the wine list—based on these taste tests. The menu planning process allows the airline to change the menus every two months, ensuring that meal selections are new and interesting for frequent travelers.

Taste testing for the passenger palate

The biggest difference between a meal in a restaurant and the dining experience on an airplane is immediacy. In a restaurant, explains Freidanck, the chef is able to taste-test while cooking—he or she has ultimate control of the kitchen. In the airline industry, there are a lot more variables at play.

“Of course, we have the problem that the food has to be cooked on the ground, and then the dish is basically deconstructed into its component parts,” Freidanck says. The meal must be transported, reheated, and then reassembled according to specific plating guidelines. Freidanck refers to this process as “uplift mode”—i.e. how the dish will be put on the plane for the crew to prepare. Practicalities such as what type of packaging will keep the prawns separate from the rice before they’re meant to be mixed must be taken into account.

This process also involves a bit of math: How many bowls of soup will be served on a flight to San Francisco, and how many passengers are on each leg of each flight? Because the amount of food on each flight must be factored into every leg of the journey for purposes of fuel efficiency and overall procedure, it's particularly important to get these equations right.

Over the course of his time with the company, Freidanck has seen the technology that facilitates in-flight dining evolve exponentially: chillers that rapidly cool hundred-pound balls of spaghetti, for example, without sacrificing uniform texture of the pasta; reheating methods that don't dry out food; and coffee machines that enable passengers to enjoy a morning latte that might as well have come from a beloved corner bistro. Convection technology may one day make it possible to actually cook meals on board—though, Freidanck adds, these methods are still in the very early stages of development.

When it comes down to it, airline food, says Freidanck, doesn't always deserve its reputation as bland or boring. "Airline food does not have to be powdered, or a big ball of unidentifiable mush," he says. "The right recipe, the right process, and attention to detail make all the difference."

With a dash of inventiveness, fine-dining in the skies is not just a possibility—it's a fine-tuned science.

This article was produced on behalf of Singapore Airlines by Quartz Creative and not by the Quartz editorial staff.